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ABSTRACT

In-depth interviews were conducted with early childhood teachers and parents in two counties with similar characteristics in Sweden and the United States. Inductive analyses revealed differences in responses between informants at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. At the macro-level were considerations of overall societal issues and general values. At the meso-level were considerations of parent-teacher relationships and general views about teaching and learning. At the micro-level were considerations of what actually happens in an early childhood program. U.S. informants had a greater number of topic comments and distributed them more evenly across all levels than did Swedish informants, who emphasized the meso-level. While Swedish parents seemed to take support for young children and their families for granted. U.S. informants discussed a lack of such support. U.S. informants desired both strict rules with strong academic content and extension of the child's initiations through play, emphasizing activities and materials. Swedish informants discussed a child centered approach to social learning and creativity and desired to be with children rather than do activities with them. This study revealed the interrelationship of the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels and the need for considering these relationships when designing and working in early childhood education and teacher preparation. Contains 14 references. (AJH)

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ECHOES OF THE MACRO-SOCIETY:

TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN TWO COUNTRIES SPEAK ABOUT

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

Building on the systems' perspective of Bronfenbrenner, the cross-cultural patterns from Stewart, and the practitioner voice from social constructivists, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informant early childhood teachers and parents in two counties with similar characteristics in Sweden and in the United States. Inductive analyses revealed differences in responses between Sweden and the United States informants at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. United States informants, both teachers and parents, had a greater number of separate topic comments and distributed them more evenly across all levels than did Swedish informants who had more emphasis at the meso-level. United States informants discussed the lack of societal support for young children and their families, while Swedish parents seemed to take this support for granted. United States informants suggested that early childhood programs were important in developing support networks among parents. Swedish teachers felt that they gave much information to parents; however, the parents described a lack of information about what was happening in the early childhood programs. United States informants desired both strict rules with strong academic content and extension of the child's initiations through play; they emphasized activities and materials. Swedish informants discussed a child centered approach to social learning and creativity and desired to be with children rather than do activities with them. These study outcomes deepen understanding about the multidimensional relationships between early childhood programs and the societal contexts in which they are embedded, and they suggest alternative approaches to working with young children and their families.

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The importance of the context of early childhood education cannot be underestimated. It is important to consider the directions, policies, and values of the larger society (the macro-level) as well as parent teacher relationships and general views about teaching and learning (the meso-level) (Andenaes, 1994; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hujala-Huttenen, 1994). Cultural patterns and philosophies are also important in understanding what is really happening within early childhood programs at the micro-level (Garland and White,1980; Huttunen & Tamminen, 1989; Pence & Goelman, 1987; Smith, 1980; Stewart, 1980; West, 1984). Such patterns and assumptions include orientations toward activity (being or doing); toward social relationships (cooperative or competitive); toward perceptions of self (as group member or individual actor) and greatly affect what happens with young children in early childhood education sites.

There are many ways to study and report early childhood issues in context. Surveys can document certain relationships between the macro, meso, and micro levels, as well as revealing differing cross cultural patterns (Carlson & Stenmalm Sjöblom, 1989, 1990; Hujala-Huttunen, 1994). "Stories" told by early childhood educators themselves enhance understanding of the dynamic variables present in early childhood education (Ayers, 1989) In the study reported here, extensive qualitative data was sought through in-depth interviews with parents and professionals. In addition to the data being reported numerically, the "voices" of the informants are also included.

Informants come from two regions--one in Sweden and one in the United States. The regional "counties" in Sweden and the United States have similar topography and population and economic distributions with one large city combined with small towns and rural areas. Sister city and connections between educational institutions in these counties also are in place.

Background on Early Childhood Education and Teacher Education

In the United States county, young children may attend child care centers, nursery schools (usually part day), Headstart, early childhood special education, or early childhood family education from six weeks to five years of age. Parents and children alike are involved in Headstart and early childhood family education. Five-year-old children attend kindergartens which are usually attached to compulsory schools. Family leave without pay is available for three months for employees who work in larger companies. Combinations of federal and state funding and private payments are found.

In the Swedish county, young children may attend publicly supported child care centers while their parents work or engage in educational training. Six year old children are usually involved in one-half day programs in separate sites, while some are attending compulsory school. Parent-cooperative child care programs are now also supported by government grants. Family leave is available for over one year when a child is born and for sixty days a year when a child is ill.

In the United States county, early childhood teacher education follows patterns typical for the United States. Students take general or liberal education courses followed by courses in professional foundations, curriculum, and field experience and receive a bachelor's degree after four or more years of study. The program follows guidelines from the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.

In the Swedish County, early childhood teacher education follows the usual format for Sweden. Students combine general education on a particular topic, such as science, followed by methods courses with a block field

experience during most terms. They receive a certificate after three years of study. Within broad guidelines from the national government, each community develops a local plan which is followed by the university program (Socialstyrelsen, 1987; Scott, 1988).

Thus, early childhood and early childhood teacher education in Sweden and the United States are very different. In Sweden, teacher education students study one area--physical science, social science, fine arts, symbolic systems--at a time and connect liberal or general education, pedagogy, methods, and field practice in this "area" study. Extended field practice with intensive supervision and parent contact is a part of each "area" study. Parents and children are supported by a strong social safety net with health insurance, vacations, and family leave. Guidelines for curriculum as well as strong government subsidies are found for early childhood programs.

In the United States, students typically study several unconnected courses at once, completing general education requirements before moving on to methods and field practice. There is separation between general and professional education and less concentrated and more separated field practice. Further, there are few social benefit programs and a great range of programs (and quality) for young children and their families.

The Research Study

Sample

Key informant early childhood teachers, sixteen from each county, were selected from the program listings of their respective Departments of Human Services and Education. A parent, selected at random from each of the programs, was also interviewed.

Survey Procedure

Structured questions based on current issues identified by researchers in early childhood education were constructed and reviewed by two experts in the field of early childhood education, one in the United States and one in Sweden. These questions were translated and pilot tested in each country. Questions addressed the following areas--dimensions of a high-quality early childhood program, ways that early childhood programs support families and children, ways that the government and society in general support families and children, ways that information about what children learn is communicated, dimensions of the most important things that should happen in an early childhood program, opinions about what is most important in preparing children for a formal education, aspects of discipline and guidance, ways that children learn to read and write, issues related to sex and death, and expressions of personal opinion about early childhood education.

A trained interviewer conducted the research in each county. The following procedure was used. After an introductory time in which subjects were made to feel at ease, the logistics of audio taping were accomplished. After the necessary authorization were acquired, the interview began with the structured questions. In follow-up dialogue for each question, the interviewer was careful not to give leading cues but merely to give responses which encouraged the subjects to express their own views. Interviews in each group (US teachers, US parents, Swedish teachers, and Swedish parents) averaged one hour and five minutes.

After the interviews, the tapes were transcribed exactly as recorded. This allowed careful examination of each subject's responses.

Analysis

Following the inductive approach described by Bogdan & Biklen (1987), these steps were used in the analysis of data:

1. Each interview (United States and Swedish counties) was read twice by each researcher.
2. The interviews were thoroughly discussed.
3. Each separate topic comment (STC) was identified within each of the answers. Transcripts were cut apart.
4. The separate topic comments were organized into groups and given category labels. Category labels were created which were applicable, for the most part, in both counties.
5. Subgroups within each main category were identified
6. Quantitative and qualitative summaries were written for each category.
7. Representative comments for both parents and professionals were identified for each county.
8. An organizational framework for discussion of the results was developed.

Reliability was assured through the researchers' independent analysis of all data from both counties. This was followed by joint discussions and combining of data for each of the steps listed above.

Results

Framework

The categories stemming from the data analysis were further organized under the macro, meso, and macro levels of society. At the macrolevel were considerations of 1) overall societal issues and 2) general values. At the mesolevel (where families and early childhood programs and professionals interfaced and where overall thinking about the nature of teaching and learning occurred) were considerations of 1) parent-teacher relationships and 2) general views about teaching and learning. At the microlevel of the early

childhood programs themselves were considerations of what actually happens in an early childhood program– 1) teacher/child interactions, 2) child-child interactions, 3) learning activities which occurred, and 4) materials used in the early childhood programs.

Overall Results

There were 567 total separate topic comments among all informants. One-hundred-ninety-four STCs (34.2%) came from United States teachers; 184 STCs (32.4%) came from United States parents; 118 STCs (20.8%) came from Swedish teachers; and 71 STCs (12.5%) came from Swedish parents. Informants from the United States tended to offer shorter comments on many different topics, while Swedish informants offered more lengthy comments about fewer separate topics. See Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

For United States teachers, the greatest number of comments related to the micro-system (seventy STCs), followed by those focusing on the meso-system (sixty-four STCs), and finally those relating to the macro-system (sixty STCs). For United States parents, the greatest number of comments related to the micro-level (seventy-eight STCs), followed by the meso-level (fifty-four STCs) and the macro-level (fifty-two STCs).
For Swedish teachers, the greatest number of comments related to the meso-system (seventy-five comments) followed by those focusing on the macro-level (forty-one comments), and the micro-level (twelve comments).
For Swedish parents, the greatest number of comments related to the meso-level (forty-one STCs) followed by those pertaining to the micro-level (twenty-three STCs) and the macro-level (eight STCs). United States

informants (both teachers and parents) tended to distribute their comments more evenly across all levels (micro, meso, and macro) while Swedish informants (both teachers and parents) concentrated their comments on the meso level.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

Within Category Results

Macro Level: General Societal Issues. In the United States county, teachers had thirty-eight STCs (63.3% of this group's macro-level responses) divided among the following subtopics: importance of regulations to assure safe and healthy environments for young children (nineteen STCs); nature of societal support for early childhood education (seventeen STCs); importance of early childhood programs (three STCs). In commenting about the safety concerns, subjects said, "Child care places should be inspected more often. They should come four times a year because it (the inspection) would keep people on their toes and keep things safe." Related to societal support, subjects said, "The government provides funds for day care to people who qualify, but that funding has, in some cases, been stopped. Things are getting worse instead of better. Middle income families are stuck--they don't get payments for child care." Regarding the importance of early childhood programs, subjects said, "The programs are really important to children's development. Alot of people underestimate the importance of the early years. See Table 1.

Parents in the United States county had twenty STCs (38.5% of this group's macro-level responses) related to the general societal issues across the following subtopics: regulations and safety (one STC); nature of societal support for early childhood education (sixteen STCs); importance of early childhood education (one response). Regarding societal support, they said, "I

don't feel the government is very supportive now of early childhood programs. The day care people are underpaid for what they do." **Regarding the importance of early childhood education, they said,** "I think early childhood programs are important, even for mothers who are not at work." **See Table 1.**

In Swedish county, teachers had sixteen STCs (45.7% of this group's macro-level responses) divided among the following subtopics: societal support for early childhood programs (ten STCs) and the importance of early childhood programs (six STCs). Related to societal support, teachers stated: " It's a complement to the families. It supports the families in that parents can work outside the family and we take care of the children. So far society has supported early childhood programs very well." **Regarding the importance of early childhood programs, teachers said,** "Yes, there's an interest in having well educated teachers. I think it's the professionals who provide the quality. **See Table 1.**

Parents in the Swedish County had four STCs (50% of this group's macro-level responses) related to societal issues, all focused on support. They said, "There may be too much societal support now." Other parents seemed satisfied with the social support but said, "It is difficult for us to find words to describe the support we feel." **See Table 1.**

<u>Macro-Level: Value Issues.</u> **In United States county, teachers had twenty-two STCs (36.7% of this group's macro-level responses) related to value issues--about self esteem (nine responses), about obedience (five responses), about love (five reponses), and religious beliefs (three responses). Regarding self esteem, they stated,** "They (the children) should have a positive view of themselves. To build self esteem is number one." **In discussing obedience, they said,** "They need to learn that the teacher is in charge and this is what is expected, and they learn to listen and take directions. They need to learn that if they don't follow the rules they will be punished or taken out of the group." **Religious beliefs were**

expressed in the following way, "We are religious in our child care center. When children ask about death we always bring heaven into it because we are Christian."

Parents in the United States county had thirty-two STC's (61.5% of this group's macro-level responses) related to values--nine related to self esteem, nine to obedience, five to love, five to religious beliefs and three to honesty. Related to self esteem, parents said, "Children should be proud of what they do. It builds their self esteem. **Regarding obedience, they said,** "They learn that if they do not follow a set of rules, there will be a punishment." **Related to love, they said,** "Love is the first thing I look for." **In discussing religious beliefs they said,** "I am a Christian and I know that my day care is Christian. This is of first importance to me. **Related to honesty, they said,** "Teachers should be honest and give children answers." **See Table 1.**

In the Swedish county, teachers had nineteen STCs (54.3% of this group's macro-level responses) related to value issues, speaking about consideration for others (eleven responses), about love and trust (three answers), about honesty (two answers), about survival (two answers), about obedience (one answer). Related to consideration for others, teachers said, "I think we need to learn to be tolerant of other people. I believe children will have use for this later in their lives. . .as you meet people, they will come to meet you. Communication and respect is *the step* to understanding people." **Regarding love and trust, teachers stated,** "Yes, the most important is that the children feel safe and loved here during the daytime when their parents are working. I think so!" **Related to obedience, teachers said,** "Yes, then you have to talk to the children and explain what you mean or what you want." **See Table 1.**

Parents in the Swedish county had four comments (50% of this group's macro-level responses) related to overall values, two related to love and trust and two related to consideration of and solidarity with others. Related to love and trust, they said, "When you trust the personnel, it is probably the most important. I

can work and if something should to him (to her son), I know they will phone me." **Related to solidarity they said,** "Solidarity with other children is very important so that they will learn what everything is about." **See Table 1.**

Insert Table 1 about here.

Meso-Level: Parent-Teacher Relationships. Teachers in the United States county used thirty-nine STCs (60.5% of this group's meso-level responses) in describing parent teacher relationships. Eighteen STCs referred to teachers giving information to parents; ten, to teachers and parents mutually sharing information; seven, to teachers consulting parents; four, to teachers facilitating the development of parent support networks. Teachers commented about giving information as follows: "We give information to parents about things in the community that are available. We have alot of one-way communication. We make a written evaluation of each child and tell the parents about their child at a conference." **About mutually sharing information, they said:** "My favorite way is to verbally talk to the parents. So much is misunderstood if it is written down. We like to have two-way contact with the parents because they can ask questions at the same time and we can discuss them." **Regarding teachers consulting parents, they said,** "We have a special time at the end of the session where I consult with the parents, and they tell me things about their children." **Related to parent networks, they said,** "This program links parents to other parents for suport. They talk about parent issues and how to deal with certain issues." **See Table 2.**

Parents in the United States county used twenty-five STCs (39.5% of this group's meso-level responses) to describe parent teacher relationships. Twelve described teacher to parent information giving, eight described mutual sharing, three described parent to teacher comments, and twelve described

parent support networks. Related to information giving, parents said, "They test children and report the results at conferences." **Regarding mutual sharing they said,** "Sometimes the teacher talks to me when I come to pick up the children, and we discuss solutions to problems that come up." **Related to parent comments to teachers, they said,** "I give my input about questions related to sex--what should be told to my child." **In describing parent support, they said,** "As a mother I have benefitted from the program and having time for myself to discuss with other adults. I am also serving on the parent advisory board." **See Table 2.**

Teachers in the Swedish county used forty STCs (56.3% of this group's meso-level responses) in describing parent-teacher relationships. Thirteen referred to teachers giving information to parents; twenty-five, to teachers and parents mutually sharing information; one, to teachers consulting parents; one, to teachers facilitating the development of parent support networks. Teachers commented about giving information, "Ah, every term everyone is always describing our planning in a detailed way. The parents will know what we are doing. And where the children are--in the classroom or on a field trip? We have different ways of giving information." **About mutually sharing information, teachers said,** "We see our parents, we see them often, we have good contact at the door (when children are coming or leaving)." **Regarding teachers consulting parents, they said,** "There are always thoughts we are discussing." **Related to parent networks, they said,** "Yes, the parents also have meetings for only parents." **See Table 2.**

Swedish parents used eighteen STCs (43.9% of this group's meso-level responses) to describe parent-teacher relationships, eight referred to teachers giving information and ten related to lack of information. Regarding teachers giving information, they said, "The teachers often talk with me about things I want to know about. They tell me things." **Related to lack of information, they said,** "It is quite bad, I think, as it is now. It is bad because I do not get information about what they

do here at the day nursery. I thought they should bring all parents together. . . it may happen later on." **See Table 2.**

Meso-Level: Views of Teaching and Learning. **Teachers in the United States County discussed general views about teaching and learning using twenty-five STCs (39.5% of this group's meso-level responses). Of those, eleven described developmentally appropriate practice; nine, creative expression; three, extension of child's initiations; two, structure and supervision. Relating to developmentally appropriate practice, they stated,** "The curriculum is very important so every child has an opportunity to learn different things because they are all on different levels of learning. **Regarding creativity, they said,** "Create an environment where children can be creative. I think kids should reach their highest potential." **In extending children's initiations, they said,** "Staff should follow the children's needs. They need to know when to step in and give assistance and when not to." **Supervision also was discussed:** "Play is important, but under supervision." **See Table 2.**

Parents in St. Louis County used twenty-five STCs (46.3% of this group's meso-level responses) to describe the general nature of teaching and learning. They used six STCs to discuss developmentally appropriate practice and six to describe creative expressions. Nine STCs referred to extending child's initiations, and four related to structure and supervision. Referring to developmentally appropriate practice, they said, "I am glad they don't hurry children in their learning. They should have different activities for different stages so everyone has something to do." **Related to creative expression, they said,** "Give them new, creative experiences." **Regarding extending child's initiations, they said,** "Staff should follow the children's needs." **Related to structure, they said,** "There should be several teachers to work with the children and give them guidance about behavior." **See Table 2.**

Teachers in the Swedish county described general views related to teaching and learning using thirty-one STCs (43.7% of this group's meso-level responses). Of those, eleven described developmentally appropriate practice; eight, extension of children's initiations; seven, creative expressions; six, structure and supervision. Related to developmentally appropriate practice, teachers stated, "It depends on how the child is. . .one child can learn, for some of them it's impossible, it takes a few years before they know that they can learn that." **In extending children's initiations, teachers said,** "And when we are in the nature and are together with the children, we help them to develop themselves in motor development. They develop their own inner strongness; that's how I believe they will get the base for managing later." **About creative expression, they said,** "Help the children to be full of fantasy and curiosity." **Structure for school learning was also discussed:** "They should have the basics before they start school."

Swedish parents used twenty three STCs (56.1% of this group's meso-level STCs) to describe the general nature of teaching and learning, six comments related to appropriate practice, six about structures for learning and school, and eleven about learning for the social good. Regarding appropriate practice, they said, "Children may not be ready to learn to read and write and count before school start, and that is not a problem." **Related to structures for school, they said,** "They need to learn to be ready for school, to sit and listen, to feel comfortable with the environment." **About learning for the social good, they said,** "It is important to have good contact with other boys and girls, to learn to discuss if there is a problem. The teacher has to be human and someone to talk with and not someone who shall sit above the children and decide." **See Table 2.**

Insert Table 2 about here.

Micro-Level: Teacher-Child Interactions. **Teachers in the United States County used seventeen STCs (24.3% of this group's micro-level STCs) to desribe teacher-child interactions. Eight of these STCs referred to directive and demanding interactions and nine discussed interactive and facilitating interactions. In the "directive and demanding" area, teachers stated,** "I lay down the rules like 'you don't bite or hit other kids.' I give a warning and if that does not work, I get close to them, like right in their faces and tell them it is not the proper way to act, and I don't want it to happen again. I invade their space and that makes them uncomfortable." **In the "interactive and facilitating" area, teachers said,** "I am aware of what kids like to do, I get down on their level and talk with them. I spend time with children and listen to them." **See Table 3.**

Parents in St. Louis County used fourteen STCs (17.9% of this group's micro-level STC's) to describe teacher-child interactions. Eight STCs related to directive and demanding interactions and six to interactive and facilitating interactions. About direction they said, They tell them what they are doing wrong and then give them time out." **About facilitation they said,** They talk about reasons to cooperate. They communicate with the children and give them choices." **See Table 3.**

Teachers in the Swedish county used three STCs (25% of this group's micro-level STCs) to describe teacher-child interactions. All of them referred to interactive and facilitating interactions. "Yes, you want to find the right way to the child, not try to force the child, but daily get closer to the child in order to understand the child better." **See Table 3.**

Parents in the Swedish county used eight STCs (34.8% of this group's micro-level STCs) to describe teacher-child interactions, all of them focused on the interactive dimension. They said, "Often they go out and play and find things like, for example, dead birds. When they (the children) ask about this, teachers explain as

naturally as possible what happens. They tell the children to ask their mother and father too." **See Table 3.**

Micro Level: Child-Child Interactions. **In the United States County, teachers used eight STCs (11.4% of this group's micro-level STCs) to describe child-child interactions. Of these, learning from each other (five responses), sharing (two responses), and respecting each other's rights (one responses) were used. Related to children learning from each other, subjects said,** "Through playing with each other, they copy each other and learn that way." **Regarding sharing, they stated,** "They cooperate and that's how they learn to share with other kids." **Related to respect, they said,** "The interaction with other kids leads to respecting other kids' property." **See Table 3.**

In United States county, parents used eight STCs (10.3% of this group's micro-level STCs) to describe child-child interactions--five to describe children learning from each other, three to describe sharing, and two to describe respecting the rights of others. They said, The playing with other kids helps them alot to get ready for school and they learn from what other kids do." **Regarding sharing, they said,** "I like how they learn to share." **Related to respecting the rights of others they said,** "They have better social skills because they learn to respect other children's property" **See Table 3.**

In the Swedish county, teachers used four STCs (33.3% of this group's micro-level STCs) to describe child-child interactions. Of these, only learning from each other was used. They said, "They have a need to play and learn together with others in the same age. Sometimes an older schoolboy comes and tells the children what it's like at school." **See Table 3.**

Swedish parents used six STCs (26.1% of this group's micro-level STCs) to describe child-child interactions. Like the teachers, the parents

described peer learning. They said, "It is really important for children to be with other children and to learn from them." **See Table 3.**

Micro-Level: Activities. **Teachers in the United States county used thirty-four STCs (48.6% of this groups micro-level STCs) to describe activities grouped as follows: creative activities (eleven responses), teacher-directed activities (eleven responses), reading to children (eight responses), and using phonics activities (three responses). Related to creative activities, teachers stated,** "They have an opportunity to experience and then to dictate their story of what happened to an adult. . .that is motivatives them for both reading and writing." **Regarding teacher-directed activities, teachers said,** "We teach them their telephone numbers, the colors and shapes, and they are familiar with the alphabet. Divide them up into developmental ages and teach them a language activity and a science activity or math." **When discussing reading to children, subjects said,** "We read alot of stories and we describe what is in the pictures. We have much good literature available to them." **For phonics approaches, professionals commented,** "We teach sounds in the preschool. You say letters and sound them out." **See Table 3.**

Parents in the United States county used forty-five STCs (57.7% of this group's micro-level STCs) to describe activities. They used fifteen STCs to describe creative activities and six to describe teacher directed activities. Related to reading, they used fifteen STCs to describe reading with a child and nine STCs to describe teaching phonics. Related to creative activities, they said, "Teachers have the children play in the kitchen and pretend to have their own family." **Regarding teacher directed activities, they said,** "Have them write numbers and use number games." **Related to reading, they said,** "They read to the children over and over. Sometimes they let the children finish the ending to the story." **Regarding phonics, they said,** "Have the children sound out words and use the alphabet books. Go through the alphabet and emphasize the sounds." **See Table 3.**

Teachers in the Swedish county used five STCs (41.7% of this group's micro-level STCs) to describe activities as follows: teacher directed activities (one response), creative activities (three responses), and reading to the children (one response). Related to creative activities, professionals stated, "Yes, we work through 'project-work' for example, no letters, no figures. We talk about the meaning of works and about our experiences. We paint and draw. We are outdoors." **Regarding teacher directed activities, teachers said,** "A program for our six-year olds has a teacher planned activity when we prepare the children for starting school. **The one comment about reading per se was follows:** "When they are around six years old, we start with books; the children might work in the Elephant Books." **See Table 3.**

Swedish parents used nine STCs (39.1% of this groups micro-level STCs) to describe activities, eight STCs related to creative activities and one STC related to teacher directed activity. About creative activities, they said, "They take them out to different activities. They do many activities connected with the seasons, being in the forest." **About teacher-directed activities, they said,** "They have gynmanstic learning experiences once a week in a gymnastic hall." **See Table 3.**

Micro Level: Materials . **In the United States county, teachers used eleven STCs (15.7% of this group's micro-level responses) to enumerate materials. Eight of these related to open-ended materials and three referred to closed materials. In describing open-ended materials, subjects stated,** "We have alot of writing materials, crayons, and paint brushes. . .sand and tools, play doh, and a kitchen set." **For closed materials, teachers said,** "We have a puzzle and letter matching activity every day." **See Table 3.**

In the United States county, parents used eleven STCs (14.1% of this group's micro-level STCs) to describe materials, seven to discuss open-ended materials and four to describe closed materials. Related to open-ended materials, they said, "It's good to have different kinds of materials like riding toys and

paints for playing outside and inside." **Regarding closed materials, they said,** "I like the puzzles that are in the center." **See Table 3.**

In the Swedish county, neither teachers or parents spoke about materials as such. See Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here.

DISCUSSION

Outer and Inner Orientations to Early Childhood Programming: Coherent and Oppositional Frameworks

Among others, two orientations toward teaching and learning have been identified--that of the inner directed learning described by Dewey and James and that of outer directed learning described by Skinner. Early childhood professionals have described constructivist education and behaviorist models. The results of this study reveal that the teachers and parents in United States county embrace these diametrically opposed systems with many specific comments. For example, at the macro level, United States informants emphasized overall values such as the importance of obedience and following sets of prescribed rules and at the same time, described the child as a unique individual who needed to develop in his/her own way to create self-esteem. At the meso-level, United States informants (both teachers and parents) spoke about the importance of creative expression and then described play as needing to be done under adult supervision. At the micro-level, informants spoke about the need for literature-based reading programs and the need for prescribed phonic approaches to reading. Informants spoke about both directive actions like laying down the rules and responsive communication with children. Informants described both closed and open-ended materials.

In the Swedish county, the views expressed focused at length and primarily on child-centered, inner-directed approaches. At the macro-level, teachers and parents discussed love and trust, while at the meso-level, references were made to developmentally appropriate practice, basic structures for learning, and learning for the social good (especially emphasized by Swedish parents). At the micro-level, only interactive and facilitating teacher-child interactions were discussed, and the greatest emphasis was on creative activities. Peer learning was also emphasized.

In the Swedish system, there appeared to be less oppositional thinking. There was a stronger emphasis on learner centered programs and styles of interaction and on group solidarity and peer interaction.

Doing and Being Approaches to Curriculum

What to do in caring and educating young children is a major concern of both early childhood teachers and early childhood teacher educators. One has only to visit toy stores or peruse catalogs in the United States to determine that there are hundreds of idea books for activities and related materials. In contrast, integrated approaches, such as those found in Sweden, arise from mutual planning and shared philosophy.

The overall differences in response distribution relate directly to this. In the United States county, the "activity" category had among highest number of STCs, while in the Swedish county, the "activity" area had among the fewest numbers of STCs. A contrast in listing of specific materials also illustrates this point. In the United States county, eleven materials, both open and closed were listed, while in the Swedish county, no specific materials were mentioned. Swedish informations described being with children in nature and through extended projects. Informants in the United States county focused more on "doing" and using specific materials while those in the Swedish county

stressed "being" with children and coming to know their inner selves. Children learned through being in a particular environment, whether that was the early childhood center or the forest.

Parents as Participants and Parents as Onlookers

Cochren (1994) has found that early childhood education in Europe differs from that in other parts of the world in that it does not focus as heavily on parent involvement and education. European systems often provide a settings where parents can leave their children while they work or study.

This study found similar differences. In the United States, both teachers and parents indicated that they gave and received information to and from each other. Emphases were on parent empowerment through service on advisory and governance boards and through parent learning and sharing networks. In Sweden, the teachers felt that much information was communicated, both through the teacher giving information and through mutual sharing. However, the parents felt that while some information was communicated, there was, in general, a lack of information. Apparently they had hoped for more parent meetings; no parents discussed a support network established through an early childhood program.

This difference in perceptions of parent roles could be due to the societal context. In Sweden, informants felt great support from the society at large, so much so that Swedish parents could not really describe it--the support was assumed. In the United States, where there was no social safety net, informants (particulary United States teachers) desired extensive regulation to assure quality as well as the safety and support felt within and through an early childhood program.

A Summary

This study has found that parents and teachers in Sweden and the United States expressed different views about early childhood education--about the societal issues and overall values at the macro-level; about parent-teacher relationships and the general nature of teaching and learning at the meso-level; about teacher-child interactions, child-child interactions, activities, and materials at the micro-level. The voices of the informants revealed the interrelationship of the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. The need for considering these interrelationships when designing and working in early childhood education and early childhood teacher preparation programs cannot be underestimated.

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Figure 1. Numbers of separate topic comments among respondent groups--United States teachers (US-T), United States parents (US-P), Swedish teachers (Sw-T), and Swedish parents (Sw-P)

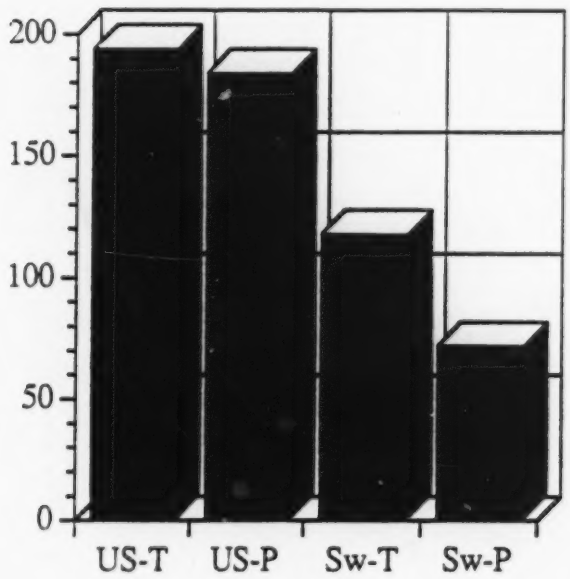

Figure 2. Distributions of Separate Topic Comments in Each Respondent Group

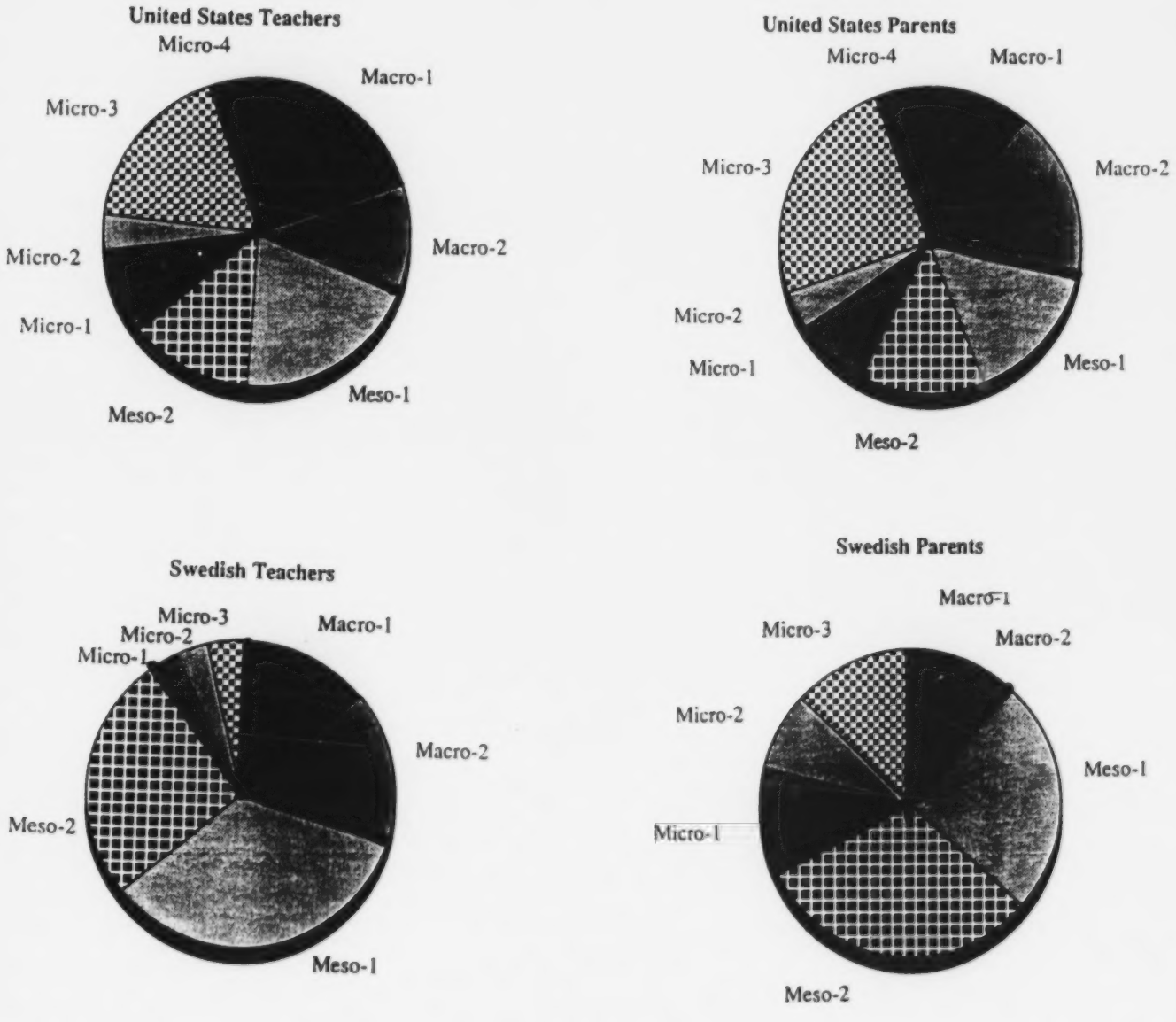

Table 1. Distribution of separate topic comments (in percentages) within macro-level categories

	US County		Swedish County	
Category	Teachers	Parents	Teachers	Parents
Macro-Level Total Numbers of Separate Topic Comments	***60***	***52***	***35***	***8***
Societal Issues	**63.3%**[1]	**38.5%**	**45.7%**	**50.0%**
Regulation/Safety	31.7	1.9	0.0	0.0
Societal Support/Non-Support	28.3	30.8	28.6	50.0
Importance	3.3	5.8	17.1	0.0
Overall Values	**36.7%**	**61.5%**	**54.3%**	**50.0%**
Self Esteem	15.1	17.3	0.0	0.0
Obedience	8.3	17.3	2.8	0.0
Love/Trust	8.3	9.6	8.6	20.0
Religion	5.0	7.6	0.0	0.0
Honesty	0.0	9.6	5.7	0.0
Consideration of/Solidarity with Others	0.0	0.0	37.1	30.0

[1] In percentage of total number of specific topic comments for a particular county and group

Table 2. Distribution of specific topic comments (in percentages) within meso level categories

	US County		Swedish County	
Category	Teachers	Parents	Teachers	Parents
Meso-Level Total Numbers of Separate Topic Comments	*64*	*54*	*71*	*41*
Parent-Teacher Relations	**60.5%**[1]	**53.7%**	**56.3%**	**43.9%**
Teacher to Parent	28.1	22.2	18.3	19.5
Mutual Sharing	15.6	11.1	35.2	0.0
Parent to Teacher	10.8	5.5	1.4	0.0
Parent Support Network	6.2	14.8	1.4	0.0
Lack of Information	0.0	0.0	0.0	24.4
Nature of Teaching/Learning	**39.5%**	**46.3%**	**43.7%**	**56.1%**
Appropriate for Development	17.2	11.1	14.1	14.6
Creative Expression	14.1	11.1	9.9	0.0
Extension of Child Initiation	4.6	16.7	11.3	0.0
Basic Structure for Learning/School	3.1	7.4	4.2	14.6
Learning for Social Good	0.0	0.0	4.2	26.9

[1]In percentage of total number of specific topic comments for a particular county and group

Table 3. Distribution of specific topic comments (in percentages) within micro-level categories

	US County		Swedish County	
Category	Teachers	Parents	Teachers	Parents
Micro-Level Total Number of Specific Topic Comments	*70*	*78*	*12*	*23*
Teacher-Child Interactions	**24.3%**[1]	**17.9%**	**25.0%**	**34.8%**
Directive/Demanding	11.4	10.2	0.0	0.0
Interactive/Facilitating	12.9	7.7	25.0	34.8
Child-Child Interactions	**11.4%**	**10.3%**	**33.3%**	**26.1%**
Peer Learning	7.1	6.4	33.0	26.1
Sharing	2.9	2.6	0.0	0.0
Respecting Rights of Others	1.4	1.3	0.0	0.0
Activities	**48.6%**	**57.7%**	**41.7%**	**39.1%**
Creative Experiences	15.7	19.2	25.1	34.8
Teacher Directed Experiences	15.7	7.8	8.3	4.3
Reading Literature	11.4	19.2	8.3	0.0
Teaching Phonics	5.8	11.5	0.0	0.0
Materials	**15.7%**	**14.1%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**
Open-Ended	11.4	8.9	0.0	0.0
Closed	4.3	5.6	0.0	0.0

[1]In percentage of total number of specific topic comments for a particular county and group